

Testimony of Chris Swope  
June 19, 2007  
House Bills 4048 and 4553

My name is Chris Swope; I am the City Clerk of Lansing and a member of the Legislative Committee for the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks (MAMC). Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding these two important bills.

HB 4048

On behalf of myself and the MAMC, I ask that you support HB 4048. Removing the restrictions on absentee voting would be a benefit to all of our residents, even those who choose to continue voting in person.

The current list of allowable reasons for absentee voting is clearly too restrictive. As an example, my employees and I do not meet the qualifications. We are not election inspectors, and we will not be absent from the city, but we are working from before 7:00 a.m. until after 8:00 p.m. I am out troubleshooting at the polling places all day, but sometimes getting to my own polling location is a struggle. My staff stays at the office all day to answer phones, they don't even leave for lunch or dinner. Others examples of people who do not currently qualify:

- People who work long shifts, but within their own city or township
- People who leave for a trip on the morning of Election Day
- Stay at home parents who don't have anyone to watch their child
- People who are legally barred from entering their polling place

No reason absentee voting is something people want; I hear about it at every election. We need to recognize that our society has changed; we live fast paced lives. For many of us, going to a specific place at a specific time is a challenge.

Some of the advantages of allowing "no reason absentee" voting are:

- People will not need to stretch the truth in requesting a ballot
- It will reduce lines at polling places
- It has the potential to increase turnout

The MAMC also asks that you look at the issue of "Early In Person Voting" to accompany no reason AV. This would allow the voter to process their ballot, as they would on Election Day, if they vote in person at their clerk's office.

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HB 4553

The MAMC absolutely supports the ability to have permanent absentee voter (PAV) lists. This bill appears to address an issue that arose in Wayne County where the Detroit City Clerk was ordered not to mass send AV applications. Since that order, there has been some confusion and consternation about how to handle permanent absentee lists.

The MAMC Legislative Committee and the Council of Election Officials (CEO), a joint group of municipal and county clerks, have adopted a position statement that outlines our proposed resolution to the issue.

We believe that all clerks who administer elections should be required to maintain a permanent AV list which must be used for all elections. This uniformity will guarantee equal access for voters across the state. We suggest requiring a written request from voters to be added to the list, while “grandfathering” those who are already on the lists. We also believe the state Qualified Voter File should be modified so the PAV status follows the voter if they move within Michigan. Finally, we support having criteria so that people who are not voting can be removed from the PAV list.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak on these bills. I am happy to answer any questions.